

Selective Credulity

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Collaborators

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Trust and information that is sent by the user

- A breakdown in trust might occur in connection with information that is sent by the user – the user supplies information and this is passed on in ways that he or she would not want.

Trust and information that is received by the user

- A break down in trust might occur in connection with information that is received by the user – the user is sent information that he or she does not believe.

Trust in early childhood

- Theoretical background: the child as scientist versus the child as trusting disciple
- Are children credulous?
- How do they avoid the dangers of credulity?

The child as scientist versus the child as trusting disciple

- Rousseau, Piaget, Montessori: the child learns best when acting as an autonomous scientist.
- From an evolutionary perspective, this is implausible: children are natural pupils who are receptive to cultural wisdom rather than the lessons of nature.

Are children credulous?

- Differential over-imitation (Lyons, 2010).
- Differential categorization (Jaswal, 2004).
- Trust in false information (Jaswal, Croft, Setia & Cole, 2010).
- From is to ought (Rakoczy, Warneken & Tomasello, 2008).
- Harris & Koenig (2006)

Thomas Reid (1764)

- Implanted in us “is a disposition to confide in the veracity of others and to believe what they tell us...It is unlimited in children.”

Bertrand Russell (1921)

- “Doubt, suspense of judgment and disbelief all seem later and more complex than a wholly unreflecting assent.”

Wittgenstein (1969)

- “A child learns there are reliable and unreliable informants much later than it learns the facts which are told it.”

Dawkins (2006)

- “Theoretically, children might learn from personal experience not to go too near a cliff edge, not to eat untried berries, not to swim in crocodile-infested waters. But, to say the least, there will be a selective advantage to child brains that possess the rule of thumb: believe, without question, whatever your grown-ups tell you.”

How do children avoid the dangers of credulity?

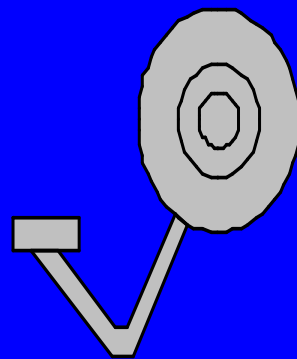
- Even if children are surprisingly indiscriminate in choosing *what* to believe they are quite selective in choosing *whom* to believe.

Children use two broad strategies

- They keep track of the history of their interaction with individuals and trust more reliable informants.
- They assess unfamiliar individuals for their cultural typicality, preferring those who conform to local norms.

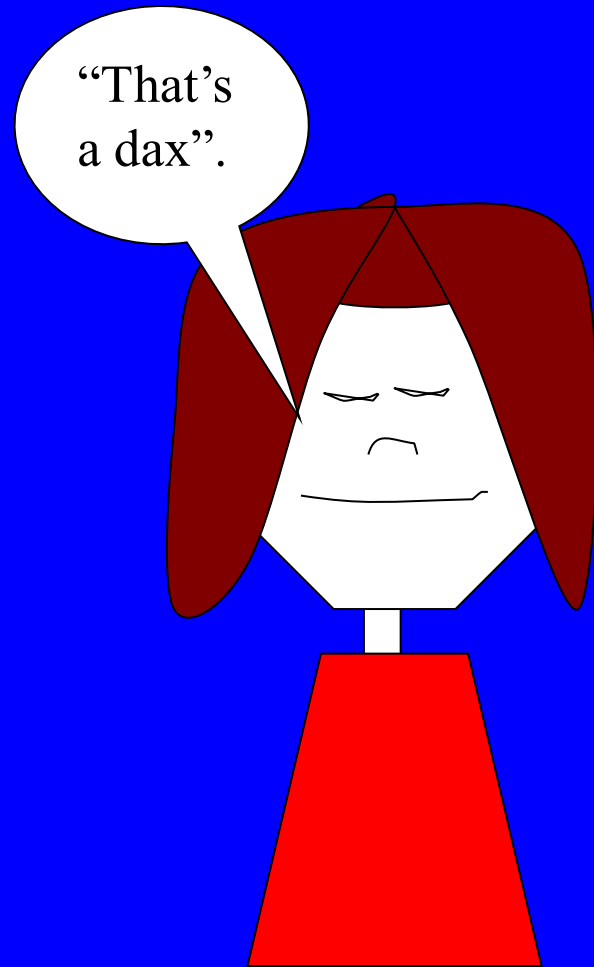
Attachment Theory

- Infants are selective in seeking emotional reassurance or a secure base (Bowlby, 1969; Hrdy, 2000).
- Only after prolonged deprivation (e.g., in Rumanian orphanages) are children indiscriminate (so-called disinhibited attachment) (Rutter et al., 2010).



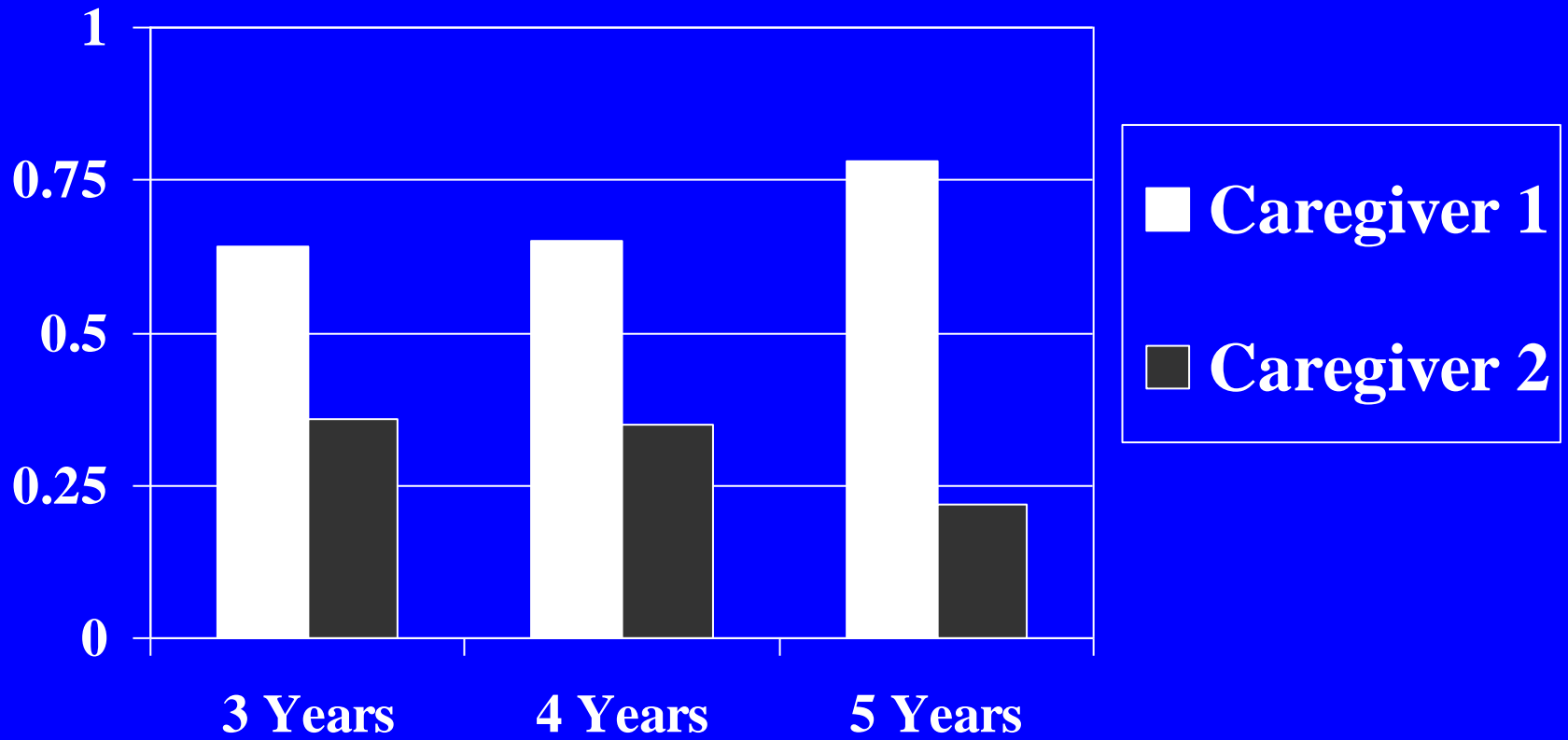


Familiar

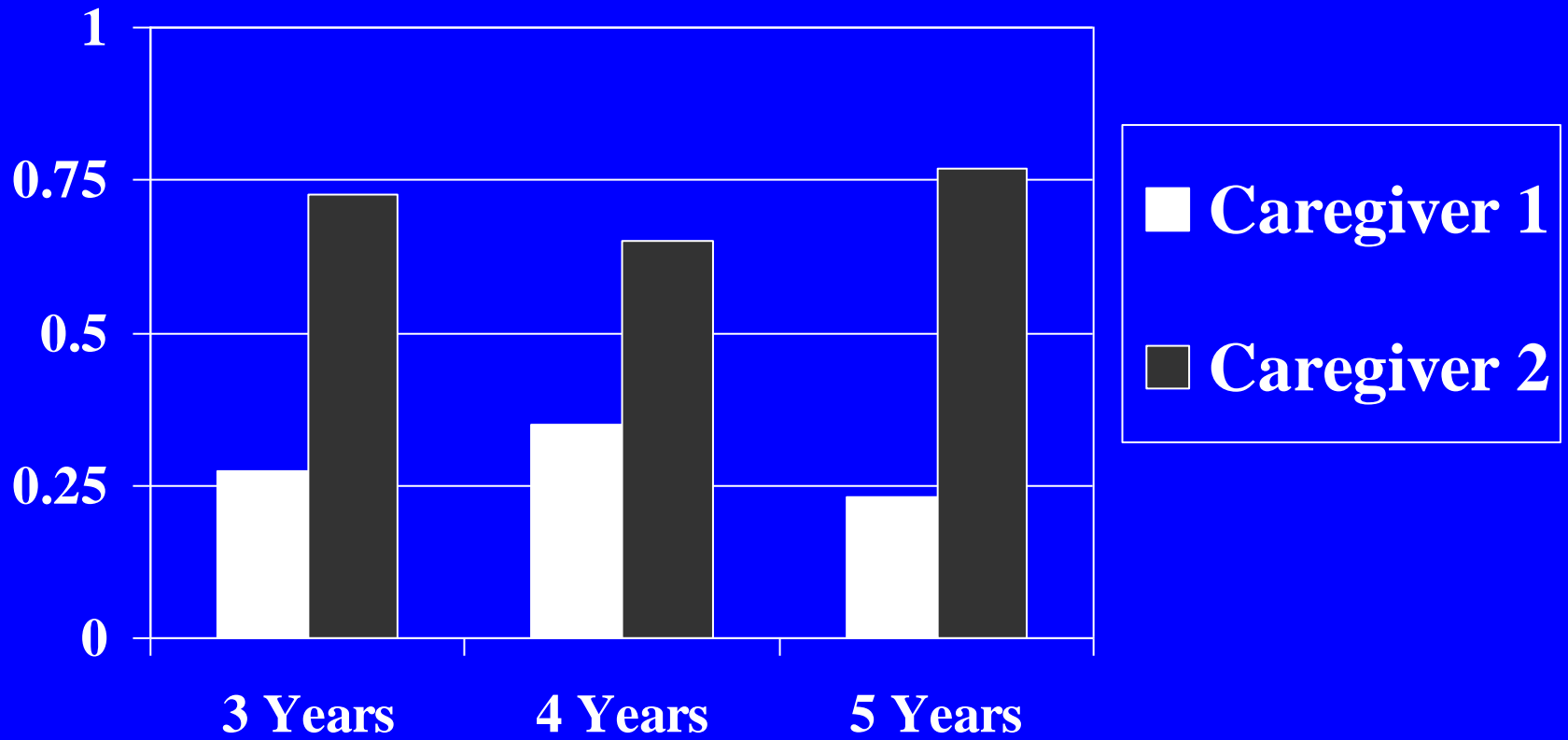


Unfamiliar

Choice of informant by Age and Caregiver at Center 1



Choice of informant by Age and Caregiver at Center 1



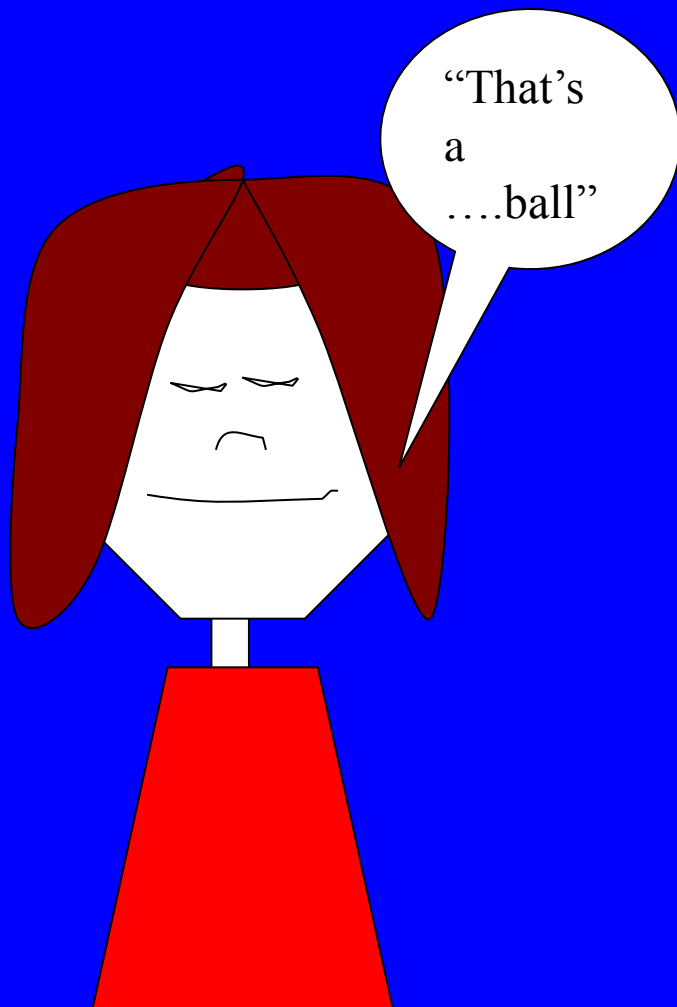
A preference for reliable informants?

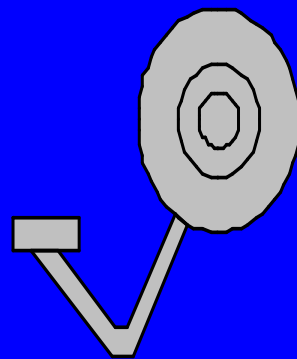
- Do children make any kind of cognitive evaluation of their informants?
- For example, do 3- and 4-year-olds prefer information from accurate as opposed to inaccurate informants?
- How long does such a preference last?

Corriveau & Harris (2009a)

- Child meets two strangers.
- Day 1: Familiarization + Test trials
- After 4 Days : Test Trials
- After 1 Week: Test Trials

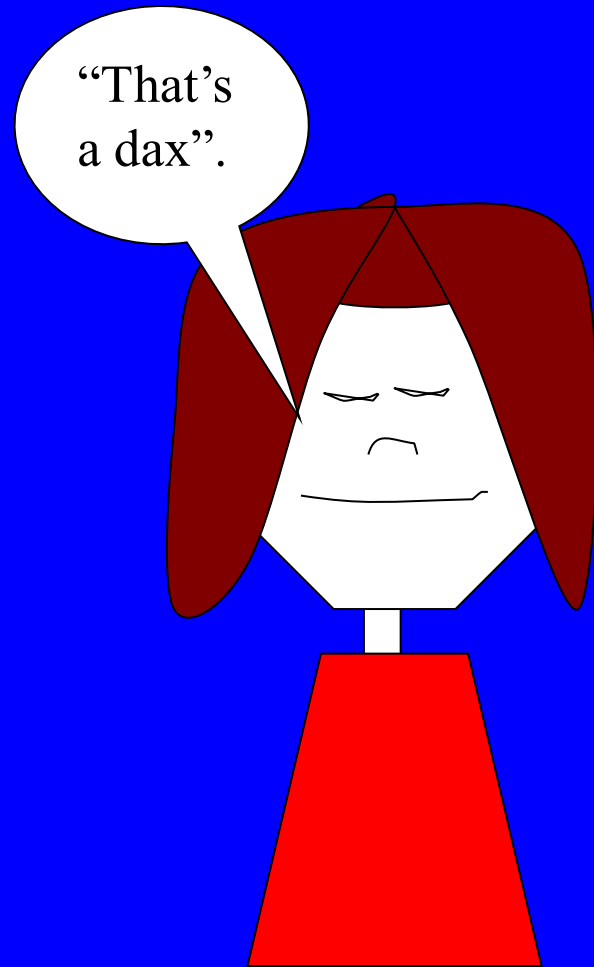






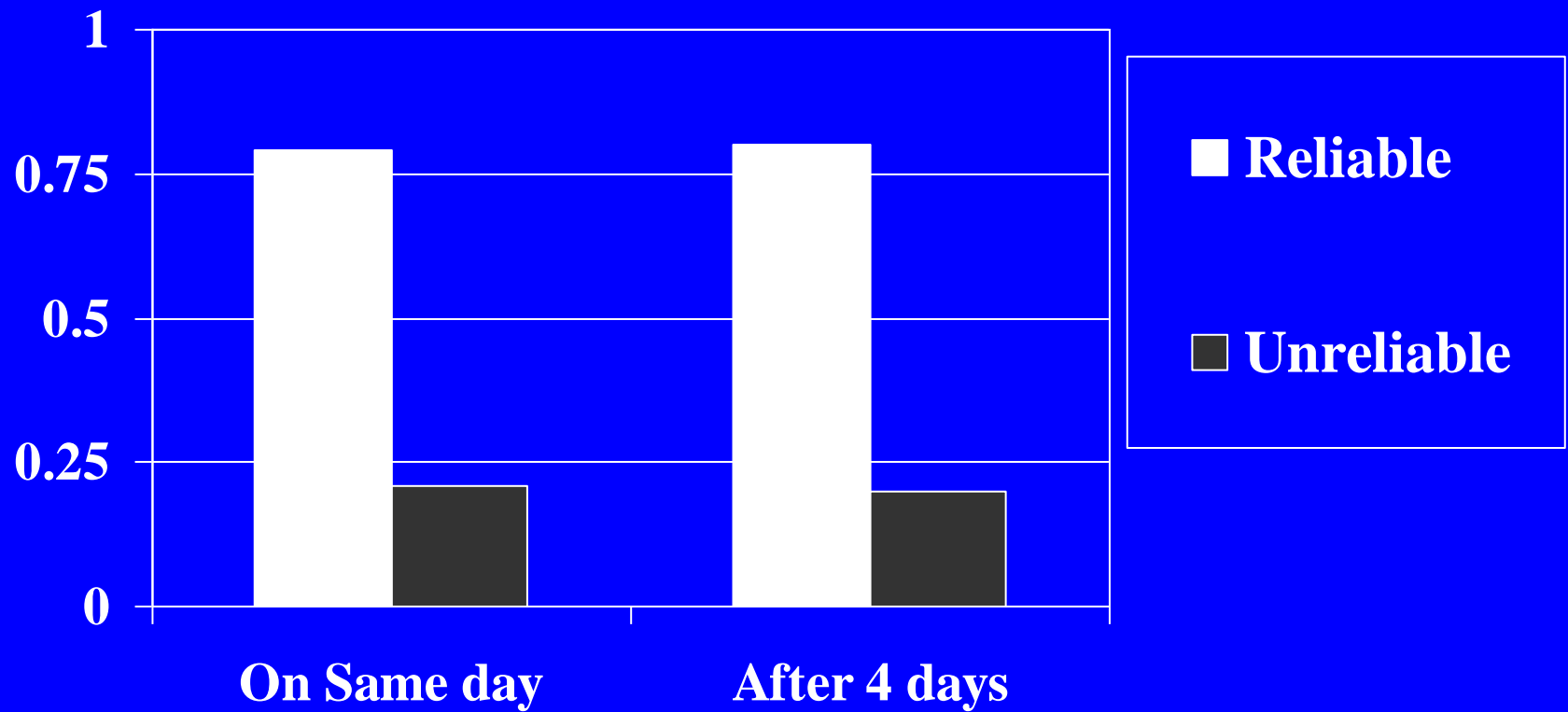


Inaccurate

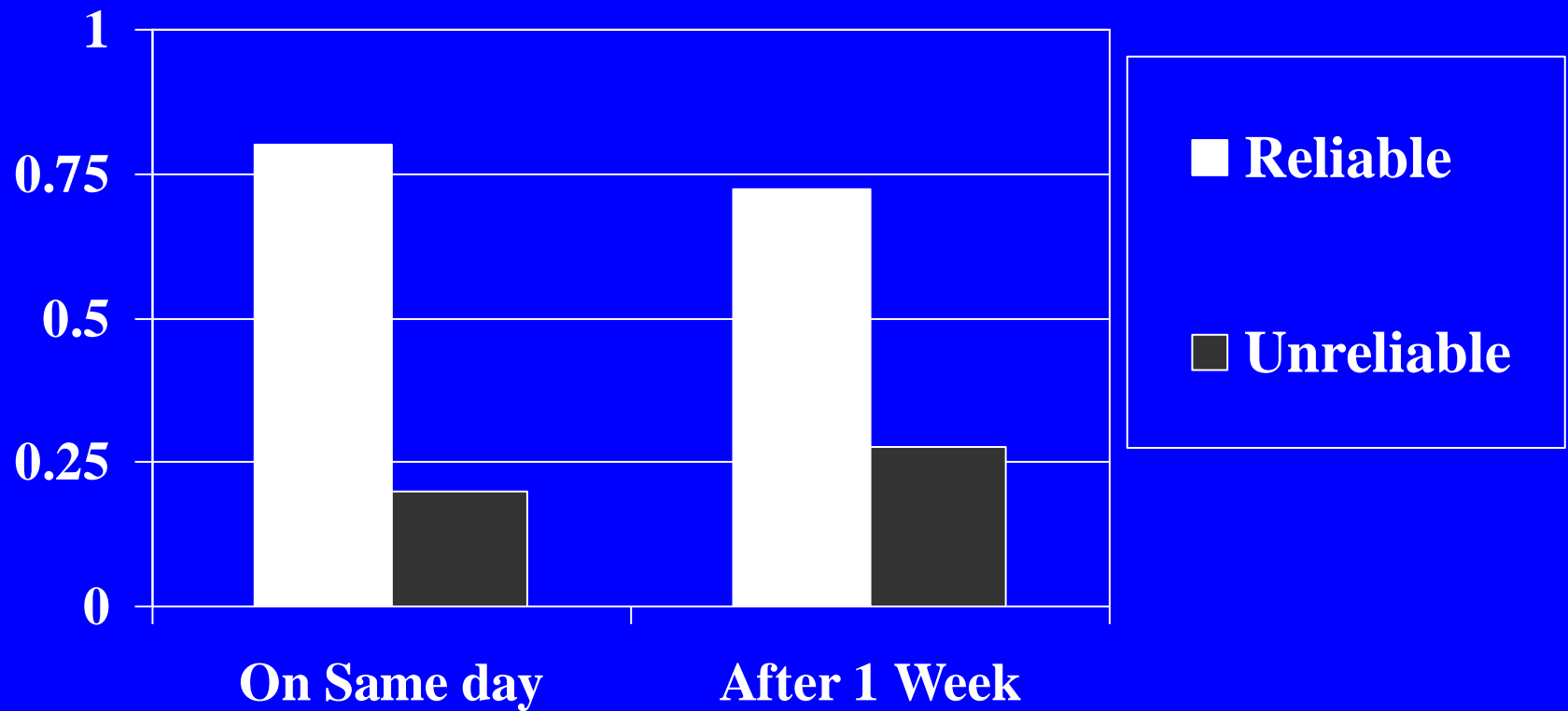


Accurate

Selection of reliable versus unreliable reliable informant



Selection of reliable versus unreliable reliable informant



Corriveau & Harris (2009a)

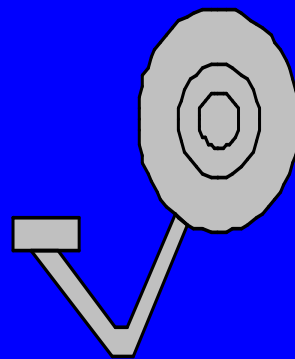
- These results extend several earlier studies showing sensitivity to informant accuracy (Birch, Vauthier & Bloom, 2008; Clément, Koenig & Harris, 2004; Koenig, Clément & Harris, 2004; Koenig & Harris, 2005; Pasquini, Corriveau, Koenig & Harris, 2007; Jaswal & Neely, 2006).

Well-established findings

- 1. Extends to facts as well as names.
- 2. Does not depend on leading questions by experimenter.
- 3. Does not depend on a contrast between 100% accuracy and 0% accuracy; 75% vs. 25% also works
- 4. Selective trust is not transient – lasts up to 1 week.

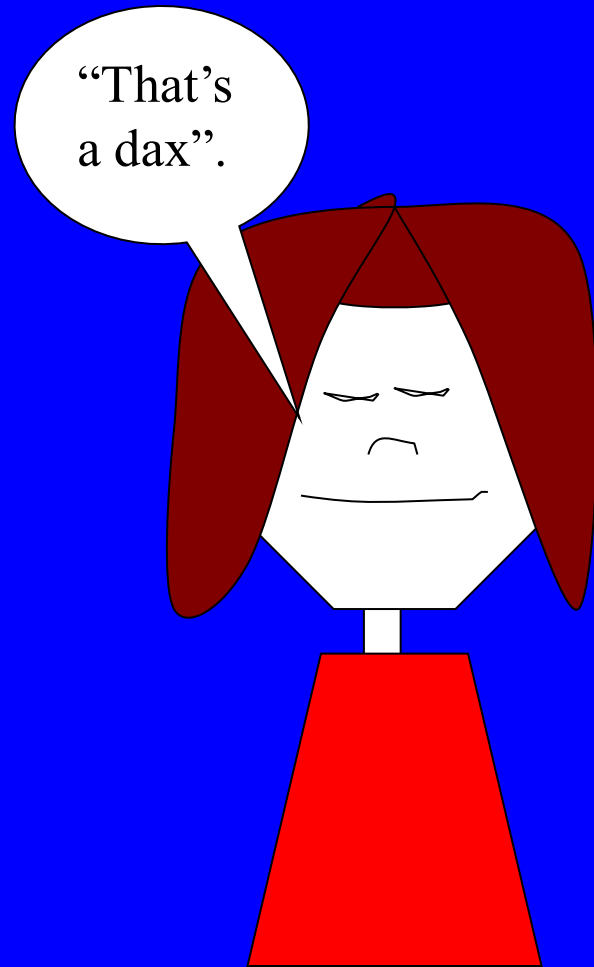
Weighing reliability against familiarity

- A familiar informant is preferred to an unfamiliar informant
- An accurate informant is preferred to an unreliable informant.
- What happens if familiarity and accuracy are pitted against one another?



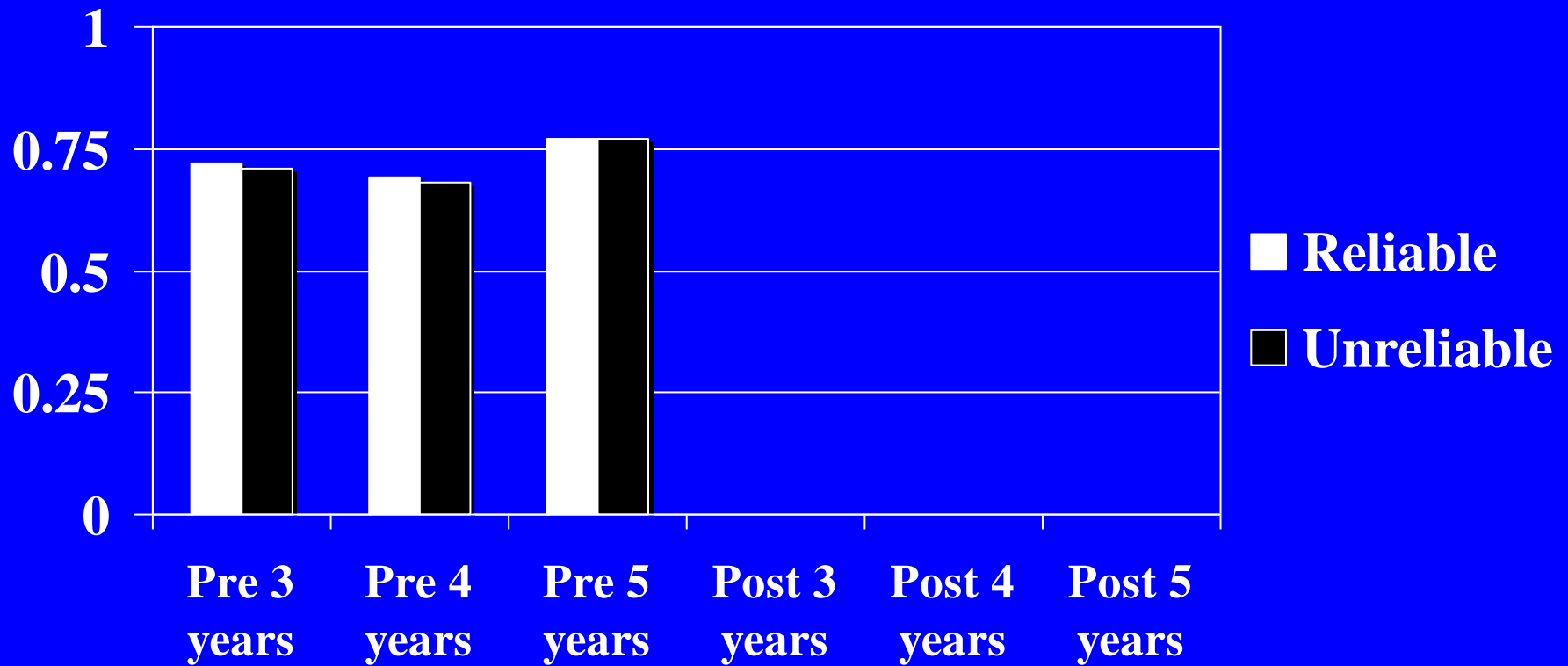


Familiar

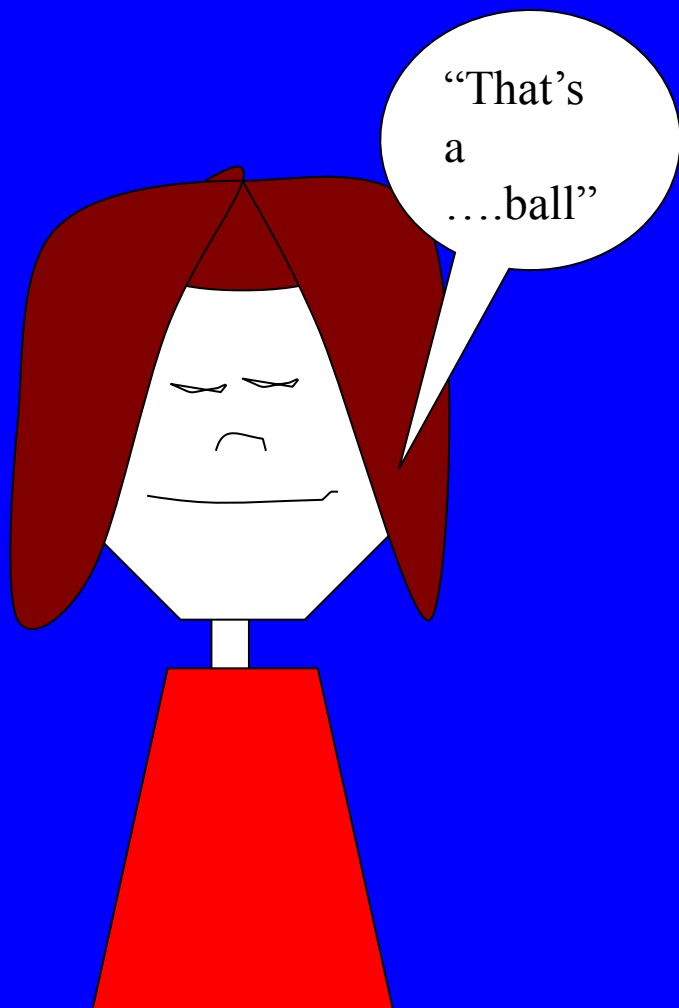


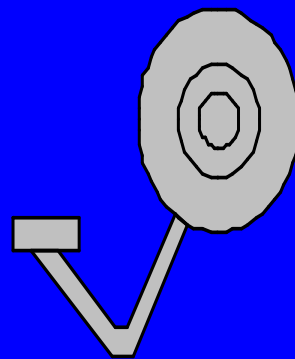
Unfamiliar

Proportion of trials on which familiar informant is chosen (pre test)



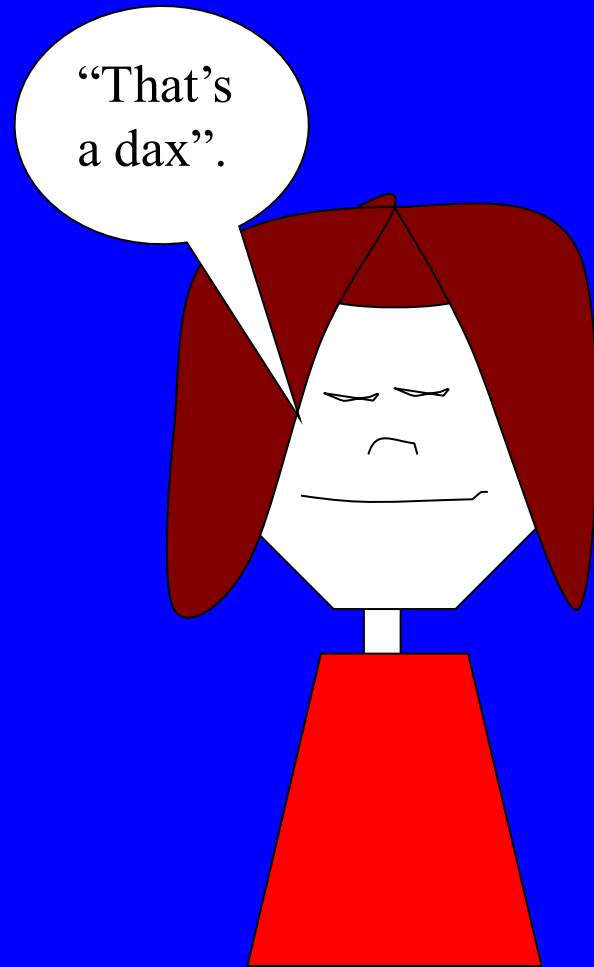






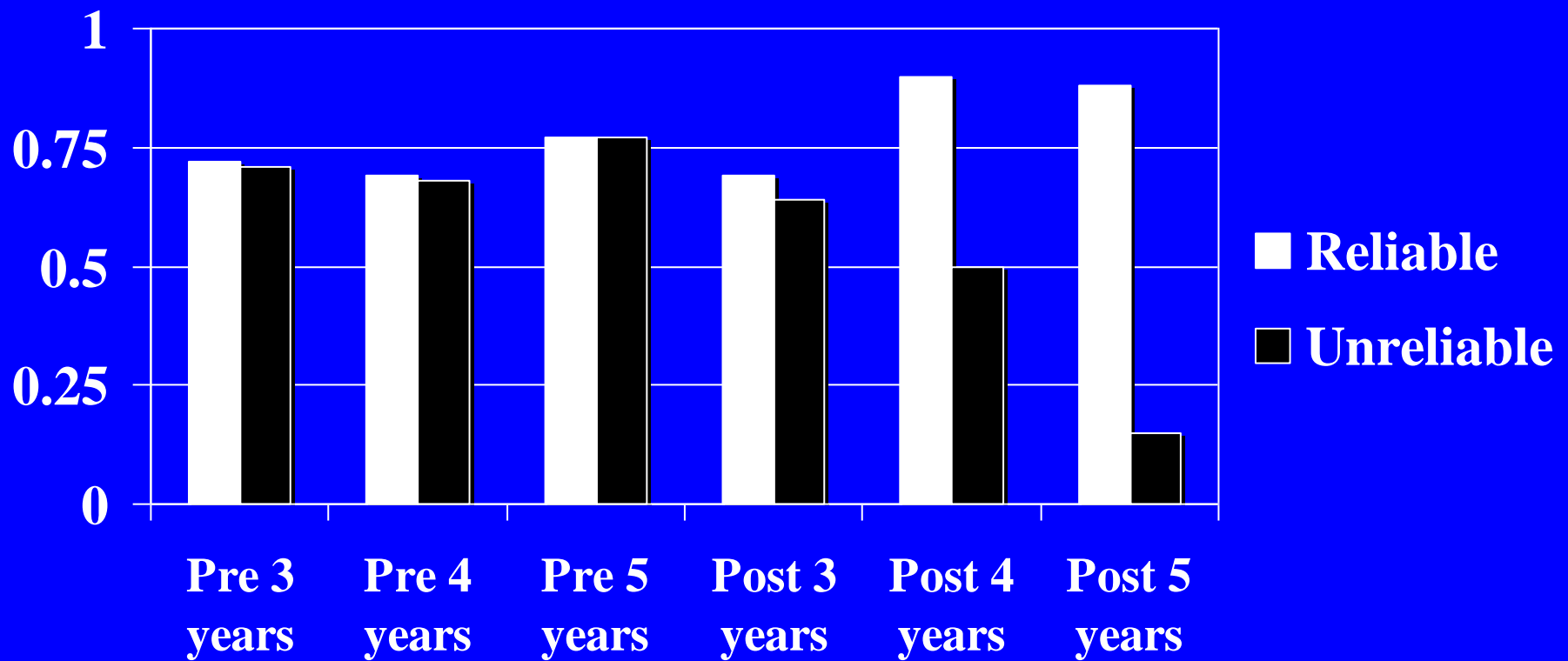


Familiar



Unfamiliar

Proportion of trials on which familiar informant is chosen (pre and post)

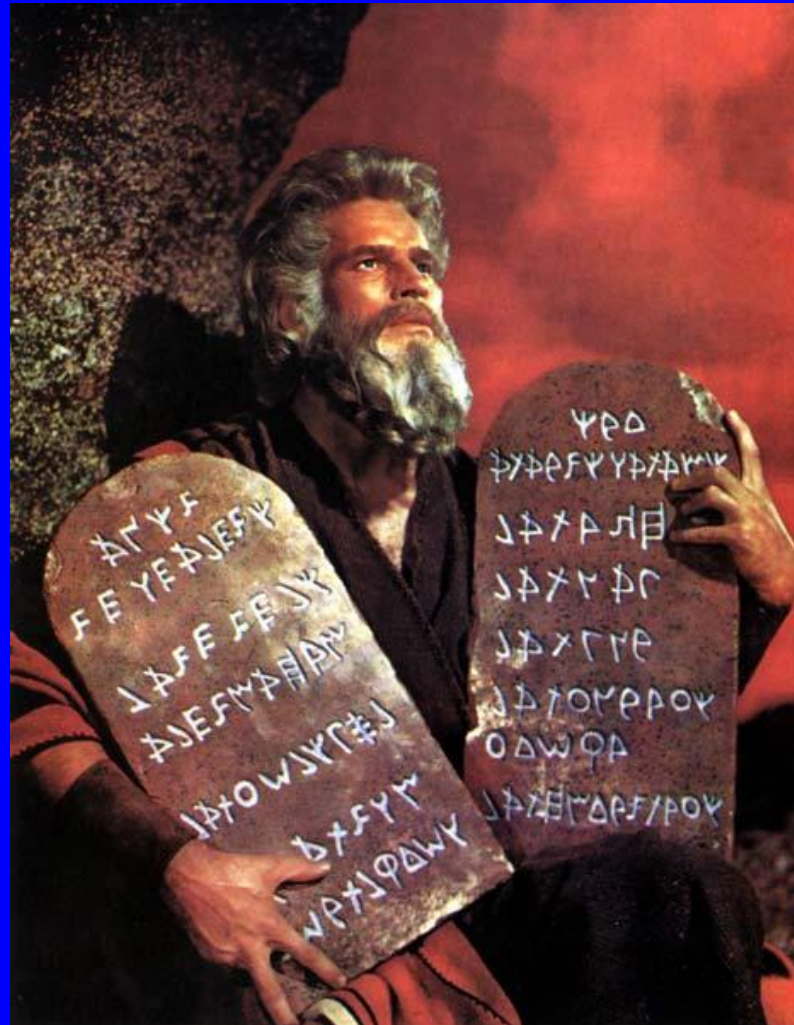


Interim summary

- In the course of early development, children's selective trust is increasingly guided by epistemic rather than socio-emotional factors. In acquiring new information, they trust reliable informants rather than familiar caregivers.
- Familiarity and attachment get you started but they do not carry you very far.

How do children conceptualize a
reliable informant?

As a wise prophet who bears
witness to the truth...



...or as a respectable citizen who
fits the norms?



Do children prefer to learn from conformists rather than misfits?

Two conditions

- Meaningful condition
- Extract from Curious George:
- “This is George. He was a good little monkey...”
- Meaningless condition
- Extract from Jabberwocky:
- “Twas brillig and the slimey tove...”

Native vs. Non-Native Accent

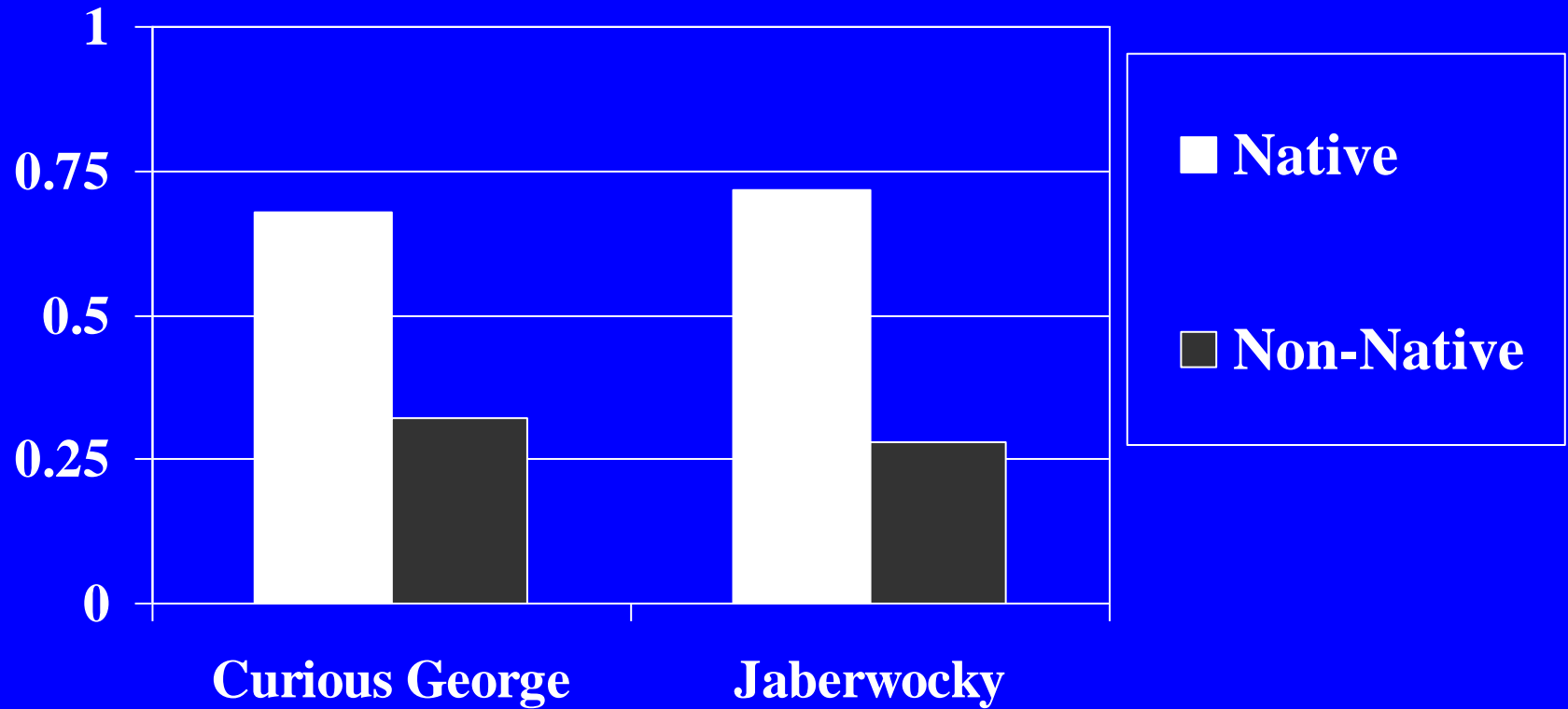


Non-Native vs Native Accent





Choice of native versus non-native speaker



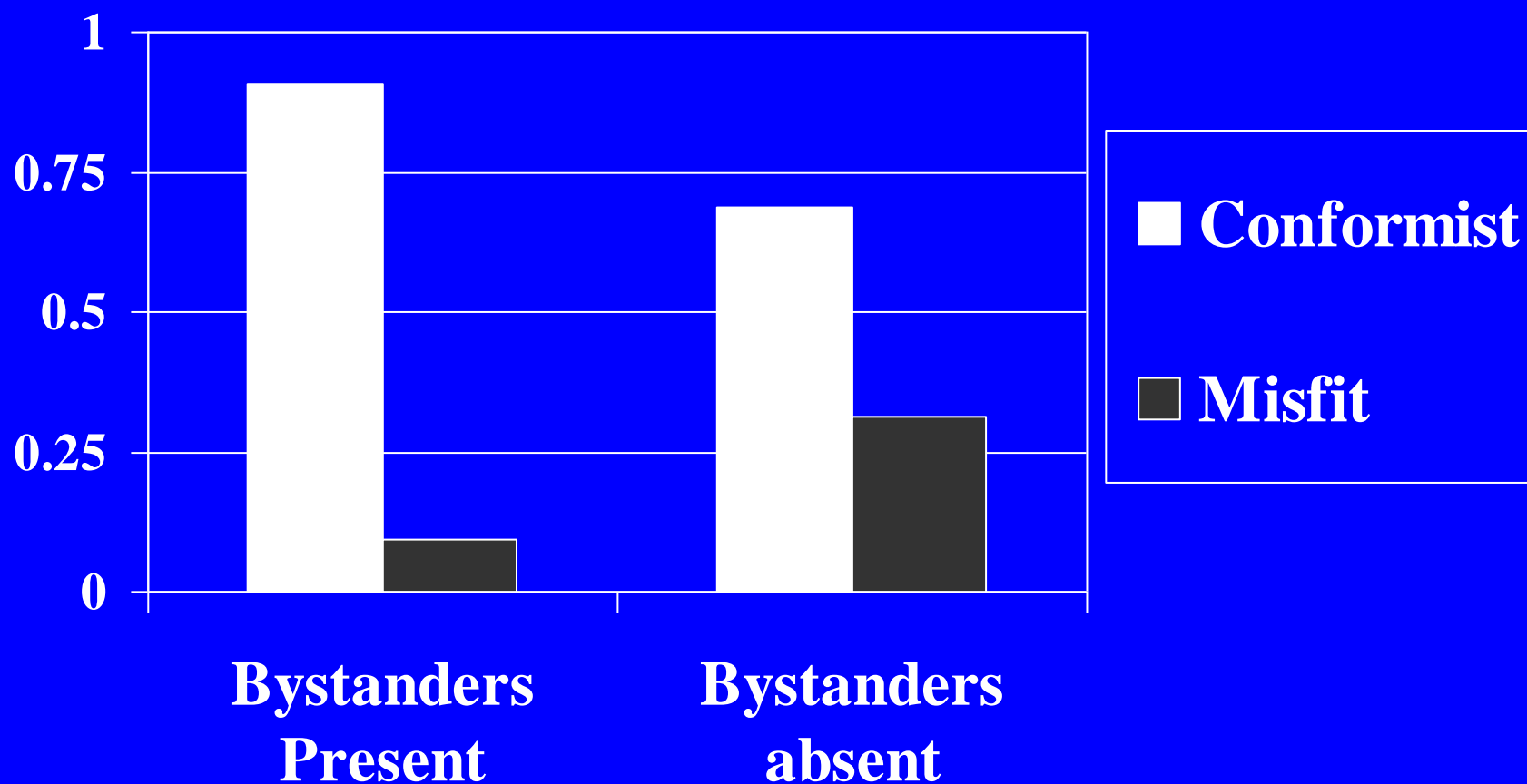
Fusaro & Harris (2008)

- Two informants.
- Bystanders assent to the claims of one but dissent from the claims of the other
- Subsequently, the two bystanders withdrew and 4 test trials were given.
- Did children continue to prefer the conformist to the misfit





Proportion of labels accepted by informant status and phase (Fusaro & Harris, 2009)



Corriveau, Fusaro & Harris (2009)

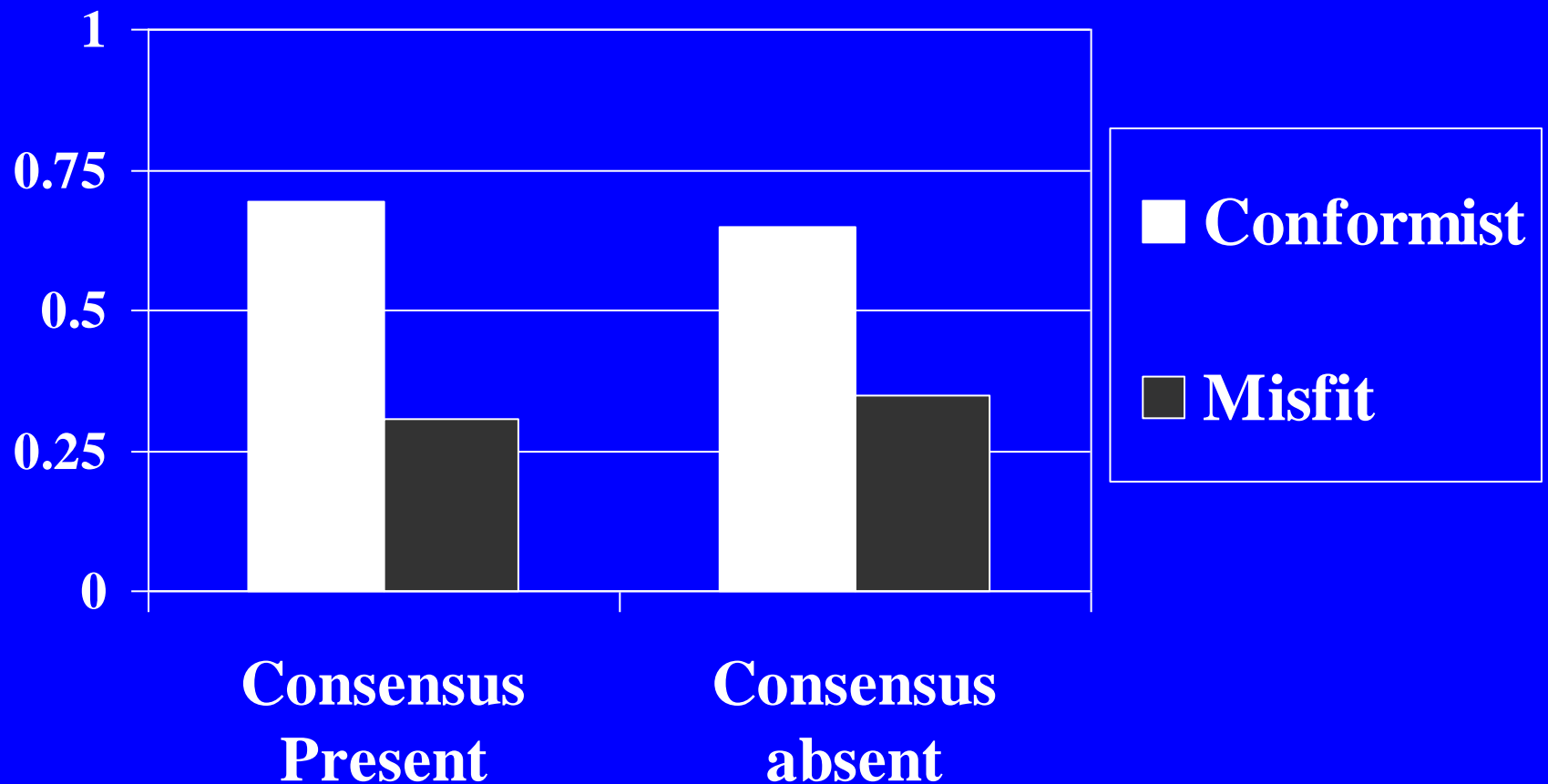
- Three informants agree, one is a misfit
- Subsequently, two members of the consensus withdrew and 4 test trials were given.
- Did children continue to prefer the conformist to the misfit

Spot the misfit

Ms. Blue is the misfit



Proportion of choices by informant status and phase



Young children are not indiscriminate in their trust

- Vertical Learning from familiar informants
- Children prefer familiar informants.
- They also prefer accurate informants
- Accuracy increasingly trumps familiarity as a cue to trustworthiness.
- Oblique and Horizontal Learning
- Children assess unfamiliar individuals for their cultural typicality.
- They prefer to learn from informants who are conformists not misfits.

Special features of the internet

- The ‘author’ of what is said is hard to appraise.
 - There is often no preceding history of interaction.
 - There is no record of past accuracy and inaccuracy
 - There are few clues to group membership
 - There are rarely indices of consensus.

Special features of the internet

- Messages on the internet have a quasi 'Delphic' quality. They emanate but children do not know their provenance.

How can we help children (and adults) to identify trustworthy sites?

- Encourage websites, or those who participate on a given site, to post cues to trustworthiness that are intuitively easy to understand.
 - Indices of past accuracy or perceived reliability of the source (c.f. eBay)
 - Indices of consensus and non-consensus (c.f. Wikipedia)

Fin

